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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

RIGHTS OF PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL OR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[12 March 1998]

GE.98-11260 (E)

1. The prevention of discrimination and the protection of minorities is included in many international and national treaties and constitutions. An "outer ring of sanctions" prevents the membership of Yugoslavia in international institutions like the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. However, agreements made with the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia continue to be valid today. Discrimination against the majority population of Kosovo is widespread and has existed since the end of the Bosnian war.

2. Since 28 February 1998 the situation in Kosovo has escalated dramatically. In the regions between Skenderaj/Srbica, Kline/Klina and Gllogovc/Glogovac the Serbian police and black-uniformed special troops - openly supported by the army and paramilitary - are attacking the Albanian population.

3. The methods of the Serbian military attack include: the disruption of a demonstration on 4 March with water-cannons, riot sticks and tear gas; the threatening presence of snipers around the office of the Albanian President, Ibraham Rugova; the killing of pregnant women; the torture and massacre of whole families; helicopters and armoured tanks firing permanently on the streets; special troops marching into private houses and firing; and denying entry to the region of humanitarian aid for hospitals. These steps have caused local Albanians to flee their homes and the region, while Serbians are being evacuated from the region as was the practice before the "ethnic cleansing" of the Bosnian war.

4. According to the Kosovo-Albanian newspaper, Koha Ditore, and the Kosova Information Centre, veterans from the Bosnian and Croatian wars are being employed. For example the Chetchnik paramilitary troops of the war criminal Zeljko Raznjatovic Arkan have been observed in Polac near Skenderaj/Srbica, along with the Serbian special troops, PJP. The Serbian army has been distributing weapons to Serbian citizens in the villages of Gojbula, Mirace, and Bukosh. It has been reported that Serbian refugees from Croatia are being called up for army service.

5. Since November 1997, preparations for an attack by the Serbian police and army have been made. Large militarily equipped contingents, with tanks and helicopters, and armed Serbian police have been moving into Kosovo. Like before the "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia in 1992, local Serbian civilians have been equipped with weapons by the regime and terrorize the population, supporting the (non-local) police troops by undertaking patrols and street controls. In the region around Skenderaj/Srbica, special forces of the police and paramilitary have been observed, in part masked, since 17 February 1998. Armoured tanks have patrolled the streets. On 21 January, the President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kiro Gligorov, warned NATO of an outbreak of conflict in Kosovo and demanded the establishment of a "corridor" through the country to Albania for "hundreds of thousands of refugees" from Kosovo. On 11 February, at a press conference in Novi Sad, Nenad Cnak, President of the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, and Miodrag Isakov,

President of the Reform Democratic Party of Vojvodina, reported that they had "irrefutable evidence" of a mobilization which reminded them of the preparations for the Croatian War in 1991.

6. Despite the sanctions against Yugoslavia, the European Union States are again participating in a lively trade with Yugoslavia. The Serbian rail and the national airline, JAT, are on offer, and since February 1998, the five most lucrative government enterprises in Montenegro, with a total worth of DM 703.8 million (US$ 385.8 million), have been up for sale to foreign investors. In June 1997, the Italian telephone association, STET, and the Greek OTE acquired 49 per cent of the Serbian telecom, worth DM 1,586,000. In February 1998, the Greek holding association, Mytilneos, closed a contract of cooperation with a volume of US$ 1 billion with the Yugoslavian copper producer, Bor, to which it must be added that Mytilneos devoted US$ 44 million for the modernization of Bor's smelteries. In 1997, Mytilneos had already invested in the Trepca mine in Kosovo, one of the leading zinc manufacturers of Europe. Since the beginning of the 1990s, most Albanian employees have been dismissed by the Serbian management because of their nationality, as in all large State businesses in Kosovo. On 27 February 1998, the Greek National Bank confirmed their interest in taking over 51 per cent of the Slavija Bank. The British company, Ready Mix, wants to invest DM 100 million in the Beocin cement works, as well as those in Popovac and Kosjeric. The French company, La Farge Ciment, and several Greek companies are also interested in Beocin. Also, German companies are in business: the steel company, Thyssen, will invest US$ 70 million in the next four years in the "ethnically cleansed" company, Feronikl, in Gllogovc/Glogovac, which is to deliver 200 tons of nickel, according to a report by the Kosova Information Centre on 29 January 1998. Thyssen is said to have already spent 4.5 million.

7. The repatriation of Albanians from European countries to Kosovo continues despite these circumstances. On the basis of the submitted reports from different organizations about the fate of deported asylum seekers from Western Europe, respect for the human rights and dignity of the repatriates, which was agreed upon in the German-Yugoslavian Repatriation Agreement, is not being observed by the Serbian regime. The Kosova Information Centre, the Council for the Defence of Human Rights and Freedoms and the Diakonischen Werkes in Stuttgart have reported frequent arrests of Albanians as they return from Germany and Switzerland, their interrogation, physical mistreatment and numerous deaths, and the humiliation and mistreatment of their relatives.

8. We therefore call upon the Commission to consider the situation in Kosovo, to condemn the past and present violence against the Albanian population, to name a special rapporteur for Kosovo and to provide him/her with whatever assistance is needed to carry out his/her work.